

Sense of Place

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The term “sense of place” has an important contribution to make in ecologically sound forest management. This term recognizes the qualities that people value in land and are not easily captured by conventional terms such as “multiple use” and “resource yield”. When people have a sense of place, they are psychologically connected to where they live, and are more likely to take into account the long-term consequences of their actions.

A “place” can be defined geographically or a locality with special meaning. While sound ecosystem management will always incorporate the best scientific knowledge, it may still exclude the richness of the meaning of places for people.

To better understand the bonds between people and “place” three concepts provide insight:

(a) To Dwell

To live authentically is to dwell, that is, to belong to a place. To dwell is to become “native” to a place;

(b) To See

People tend to see what they want to see, or what their culture, education and experience has prepared them to see. The more people fully “see” where they live, and understand its moods and rhythms, the more they become part of the place where they live.

(c) To Design

Nature is not just a set of limits, but is rather an elegant model for the design of ecologically sustainable forest practices. After 3.8 billion years of evolution, nature has learned what works best, and what lasts. A study of nature’s models in the place where people live will promote learning about the nuances and understanding of the natural patterns and processes they are imbedded within.

Natural resources, from a human perspective, exist in both a social and political world. The deeper humanity’s understanding of their sense of place, the richer and deeper the quality of their culture. Every resource or land use planning exercise is actually an exercise in working out a shared understanding between people and land. When people and land are interdependent, both will prosper. When people and land are in competition, both are exploited. A well-developed sense of place will deepen and broaden humanity’s understanding of this most important relationship.